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Khartoum Bahri Evangelical church minister acquitted

CSW (05.01.2016) - Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has learned that Pastor Hafiz Mengisto, senior minister of the Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church was acquitted of obstructing a public servant from performing the duties of his office on 29 December 2015. Mohaned Mustafa, lawyer for the church who was charged with the same crime had his case dismissed on 23 December 2015.

Mr Mustafa and Pastor Mengisto's trial began on 14 December 2015 at the Khartoum Bahri Criminal Court. On 23 December, the court accepted that the prosecution had failed to follow procedure when initiating a criminal case against a registered lawyer and dismissed the case against Mr Mustafa. The case against Pastor Mengisto continued until 29 December, when the court ruled that the church leader had not committed a crime.

Pastor Mengisto and Mr Mustafa were arrested and charged on 1 July 2015 after police officers arrived at Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church with a court order to demolish a building on the church's property. Pastor Mengisto sustained injuries to his head and ear while in police custody and required medical attention upon his release.

The trial of Mr Mustafa and Pastor Mengisto occurred in the midst of a crackdown against Christians in Sudan. During December 2015, National Intelligence) and Security Service (NISS) agents arrested a Christian activist and two religious leaders. Talahon Nigosi Kassa Ratta, an activist and member of the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church (SEPC), was arrested on 14 December 2015 in Khartoum and Reverends Kwa Shamal and Hassan Abduraheem of the Sudan Church of Christ were arrested on 19 December 2015. While Mr Ratta's parents were able to visit him in Kober Men's Prison at the end of December 2015, he has since been moved to an unknown location and remains detained without charge. Reverends Shamal and Abduraheem are also being held in unknown locations without charge.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We welcome the court's decision to acquit Pastor Mengisto and dismiss the case against Mr Mustafa. However, we remain deeply concerned by the State's repressive actions against religious minorities in Sudan, as exemplified by the arrest and detention of Mr Ratta and Reverends Shamal and Abduraheem. We call for their immediate and unconditional release. Their detention without charge is in clear violation of their right to liberty and security of person as detailed in article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Sudan is a party and we appeal to the international community, and in particular to the African Union, to hold Sudan to its obligations under international law by pressing for their immediate release."

Two pastors and an activist detained incommunicado

CSW (22.12.2015) - Christian Solidarity Worldwide is concerned to learn of the incommunicado detentions of religious leaders in Khartoum and Omdurman, and a Christian activist in Khartoum.

On Saturday 19 December, Reverend Kwa Shamal and Reverend Hassan Abduraheem of the Sudan Church of Christ were arrested at their homes in Khartoum North and Omdurman respectively. According to local sources, the arrests were coordinated by National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) agents.

The NISS agents arrived at the clergymen's homes at approximately 7am and arrested them. No one has seen or heard from either clergyman since their arrests; however, both are thought to be held in a NISS detention centre.

In June 2014, Reverend Kwa Shamal made an unsuccessful appeal to the Khartoum North Commissioner to prevent the demolition of the church he led in Thiba Al Hamyida in Khartoum North which was razed to the ground after local officials gave 24 hours verbal notice of the demolition.

The detention of Reverend Shamal and Reverend Abduraheem followed the arrest of Christian activist Talahon Nigosi Kassa Ratta by NISS agents on 14 December in Khartoum. A member of the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church (SEPC), Mr Ratta was involved in organising protests against government interference with SEPC property. In December 2014 Mr Kassa Ratta was a member of the committee involved in organising a vigil calling for the end of the illegal sale of the church's property. No reason was given for his arrest and his whereabouts remain unknown.

The destruction of Christian places of worship is characteristic of ongoing and systematic restrictions on the rights and freedoms of Sudan's religious minorities. The Christian community in Sudan is a primary target.

On 27 October, a Sudanese Church of Christ building in Karari, Omdurman was demolished by local officials without notice. According to Morning Star News, the church's leaders registered a formal complaint to the Ministry of Endowments and Religion, the body charged with overseeing religious affairs in the country, but have not received a response. On 21 October, a Lutheran Church in Omdurman was demolished by local officials, who gave a day's notice, and on 17 October, a Lutheran Church in Gadaref, East Sudan was burned down.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are deeply concerned by the coordinated arrests of Reverend Kwa Shamal, Reverend Hasssan Abduraheem and Talahon Nigosi Kassa Ratta. These men were arrested without charge and are being detained incommunicado in direct violation of their right to liberty and security of person, as articulated in article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to which Sudan is a party. Their confinement amounts to arbitrary detention and we call for their immediate and unconditional release. We also call on the international community, in particular the African Union to hold Sudan to its international obligations."

25 Muslims on trial for apostasy

CSW (21.12.2015) - Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has learned that 25 Muslims are on trial in Sudan, charged with apostasy.

The charges against the 22 men and three minors were confirmed by a judge at the Khartoum Criminal Court on 14 December.

Although the defendants are charged with apostasy they have not converted from Islam, but follow an interpretation that differs from that of the ruling regime. They face charges of rejecting the teachings of the Prophet Mohammad because their group does not recognise the authority of the Hadith and only follows the teachings of the Qur'an.

Local police arrested the 24 men and three children in two groups on 2 and 3 November in the Mayu neighborhood of South Khartoum. They were detained for a month while police investigated the alleged crimes. On 30 November, the minors were released on bail on the condition they attend all court hearings related to the case; however, the court refused to try them separately as required by Sudanese law. On 9 December, the court dismissed two defendants from the trial due to lack of evidence. On 14 December, the court confirmed the charge of apostasy against the remaining defendants and released them on bail pending the next hearing, which was set for 9 February 2016.

Earlier this year the Sudanese parliament passed several amendments to the criminal code. Article 125 concerning blasphemy and Article 126 concerning apostasy were extended to include cursing the prophet of Islam, his wives, his household or his friends. Each of these crimes carries the death penalty, however, if a person repents they will receive a maximum of five years imprisonment and an unspecified number of lashes.

The new amendments primarily target Shia Muslims but also affect those who, like the defendants, reject the Hadith and believe in following the Qur'an only. Although parliament approved these amendments, they conflict with provisions guaranteeing freedom of religion or belief in Sudan's 2005 interim constitution and do not comply with the international standard of freedom of thought, conscience and religion as guaranteed in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Sudan is a signatory.

The amendments are of particular concern as Sudan is currently conducting a national dialogue process to produce a new constitution. Since South Sudan became an

independent nation, President al Bashir has repeatedly stated that the new constitution will be 100% Islamic.

CSW Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are deeply concerned by the expansion of the apostasy legislation and the charges faced by this group of individuals, and particularly the minors, whose treatment violates the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The government has a responsibility to protect and uphold freedom of religion or belief, but does not have the right to determine what passes as acceptable religious practice. We call for these charges to be dropped unconditionally and for the international community to hold the Sudanese government to account under the international treaties to which it is party."

Notes to Editors:

1. There are two primary sources of Islamic theology - the Qur'an and Sunna. The Qur'an is regarded as infallible, as directed from God word by word to the Prophet Muhammad. Sunna is the example of the Prophet elaborating on and living out the teachings of the Qur'an. The Sunna of the Prophet is recorded within the Hadith, the collection of sayings or events transmitted by the contemporaries of the Prophet and the first four caliphs - the leaders of the Islamic community after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. For more information please see CSW's apostasy report.

2. The defendants are;

1. Ebrahim Essa Abakar (m) 23 years old;
2. Muatasem Yousef Abaker (m) 21 years old;
3. Samen Alzebair Abdalla (m) 27 years old;
4. Alyas Mohamed Abdalla (m) 51 years old;
5. Khames Mohamed Abdalla (m) 23 years old;
6. Murwan Mohamed Abdalla (m) 20 years old;
7. Ebrahim Yousef Abdallah (m) 27 years old;
8. Waleed Abdalmuneam (m) 20 years old;
9. Fawzi Abdalla Adam (m) 20 years old;
10. Yousef Essa Adam (m) 25 years old;
11. Refat Abdalmoamen Awad (m) 16 years old;
12. Ayman Saied Ebrahim (m) 19 years old
13. Abderahman Saied Enrahim (m) 37 years old;
14. Mohamed Abdalsalam Gebreal (m) 25 years old;
15. Amen Khalil Gebril (m) 16 years old;
16. Haroun Adam Haroun (m) 30 years old;
17. Munair Bashir Hassan (m) 15 years old;
18. Hassan Abakar Osman (m) 19 years old;
19. Alamin Salih Osman (m) 25 years old;
20. Awad Ebrahim Osman (m) 28 years old;
21. Rabeel Abdalhameed Mohamed (m) 28 years old;
22. Emam Alyas Mohamed (m) 21 years old;
23. Mokhtar Khalil Musa (m) 36 years old;
24. Awad Mohamed Mussa (m) 33 years old;
25. Essa Yagoup (m) 20 years old.

Sudan: Two evangelical Lutheran churches destroyed

CSW (27.10.2015) - Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has been informed that two Lutheran Church buildings have been destroyed in Sudan within the last fortnight.

On 21 October, a building in Hai Thura Block 29, Omdurman, used by both the Lutheran and Lutheran Evangelical Churches, was demolished by local officials.

The leaders and congregations were informed on 20 October that the building was due to be demolished as part of redevelopment plans for the area. Church representatives met with the State Governor, who gave assurances that the building would not be demolished. Nevertheless on the following day bulldozers arrived at the premises and the church was destroyed. However, a mosque directly opposite the church was left standing.

Local sources have also confirmed to CSW that an Evangelical Lutheran Church building was burned down on 17 October in Gadaref, East Sudan. The building was completely destroyed, including the furniture and bibles that were inside it. Church officials have reported the attack to local police.

The destruction of the church building in Omdurman is the latest in a series of demolitions of Christian houses of worship in Sudan, where systematic government restrictions on the rights and freedoms of religious minorities primarily target the Christian faith.

In other news, on 10 October National Dialogue efforts aimed at determining the future of Sudan were re-started by the ruling party and some opposition parties. President al Bashir's previous statements have raised doubts as to whether the National Dialogue will lead to a truly representative national vision that reflect the aspirations of the entire Sudanese population, including its religious and ethnic minorities.

Speaking at the National Council for Strategic Planning on 26 October, President al Bashir expressed his hope that the National Dialogue conference would result in a consensus on a unified vision to formulate the future according to the national will. However, in 2011, President al Bashir reiterated that after the cessation of South Sudan, Sudan would be 100% Arabic and Islamic.

Andy Dipper, Chief Operating Officer at Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, "The congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church has not only lost its meeting place but also faces permanent displacement since the government no longer permits the construction of new churches. CSW calls on the Sudanese government to respect the constitutionally guaranteed right of freedom of religion or belief, both in law and in practice, and to cease the illegal destruction of Christian places of worship. We also urge the Sudanese authorities to ensure that a thorough investigation is conducted into the torching of the church in Gadaref, and that any identified perpetrators are swiftly brought to justice."

Sudanese court of appeal overturns Christian woman's conviction for public indecency

CSW (16.10.2015) - Khartoum Bahri Appeal Court has overturned a Christian woman's conviction for public indecency.

Ferdoos Eltoum was one of a group of Christian women from the Nuba Mountains arrested on 25 June after leaving a celebration service at the El Izba Baptist Church in Khartoum. She was convicted on 6 July of public indecency under Article 152 of Sudan's Criminal Code based on what she wore at the court hearing. This decision was overturned by an appeal judge on 30 September and formally communicated on 14 October. The appeal court ruled that the trial judge had departed from criminal procedure by bringing

fresh charges against Ms Eltoun and convicting her, and should have sent her to the prosecutor to determine whether or not a charge should be brought.

During Ms Eltoun's initial trial hearing in July, two witnesses gave evidence on her behalf. A church minister testified that her attire did not violate Christian dress codes, while a Sudanese woman stated that Ms Eltoun's dress did not violate Sudanese culture. However, the judge did not rule on the initial charge. Instead he charged and convicted Ms Eltoun under Article 152 based on what she had worn to court and handed down a fine of 500 Sudanese Pounds (approximately £54).

Ms Eltoun later appeared in court on 13 July for a ruling on the original charge relating to the outfit she wore on the evening of 25 June. The judge found her guilty of indecent dress under article 152 and gave her a fine of 500 Sudanese Pounds (£54) and a suspended sentence of 20 lashes. Lawyers representing Ms Eltoun have also appealed this sentence and are awaiting the court of appeal's judgement.

The ambiguous charge of public indecency contained in Article 152 of Sudan's Criminal Code is used disproportionately against religious and ethnic minorities, including Christian women. It gives Public Order police and courts wide-ranging powers to arrest and convict individuals. However, the law is sufficiently vague that it allows police and judges to make subjective judgments that in practice are discriminatory.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, "Whilst we welcome the decision to overturn Ms Eltoun's conviction and the recognition that the trial judge made an error in law, we continue to call on the Sudanese authorities to review the Criminal Code and amend Article 152. We particularly remind Sudan of its obligations under Article 2 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' rights of non-discrimination on the basis of religion or gender."

Christian woman found innocent of public indecency charges

CSW (17.08.2015) - A Christian woman, Seema Ali Osman, was found innocent of indecent or immoral dress under Article 152 of the Sudanese Criminal Code on 16 August.

She was part of a group of Christian women from the Nuba Mountains who were [arrested on 25 June](#) after leaving a celebration service at the El Izba Baptist Church in Khartoum.

Two were released without charge while the remaining ten were charged with indecent or immoral dress and tried at the Public Order Court in Khartoum. Seema Ali Osman was the last one to face trial. On [12 August](#), Hala Ibrahim, Ishraga James, Inas Mohamed Elkomani and Mawaheb Suliman were found innocent. Nasra Omer Kakoum, Wegdan Aba Alla Salih and Uthan Omer Eljaily were convicted and fined 50 Sudanese pounds (approximately £5). In July, Ferdoos Eltoun and Rehab Omer Kakoum, were [found guilty](#) and fined 500 Sudanese pounds (approximately £50).

Under Article 152 of the Sudanese Criminal Code, the Public Order Police have broad scope to define what constitutes indecent or immoral dress.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, "We welcome Seema Ali Osman's release but continue to question the inconsistent handling of these women's cases, which appear to be part of an ongoing campaign of repression against ethnic and religious minorities in Sudan. We remain deeply concerned by the

ambiguity and arbitrary application of the law, and renew our call for it to be clarified or repealed. The African Union and the rest of the international community must hold Sudan to account for its failure to respect the right to freedom of religion or belief, as outlined in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Sudan is party.”

Don't flog teenagers for indecent dress

AI/UK (16.08.2015) - <http://bit.ly/1KDGMcX> - On 16 August, a court in Sudan found Ferdous Al Toum guilty of 'indecent or immoral dress' and sentenced her to 20 lashes and a fine of 500 Sudanese pounds.

No date has yet been set for Ferdous' lashes. She's appealing the sentence, but we need to keep the pressure on Sudanese authorities to stop the flogging. Ferdous has committed no crime, and the tortuous punishment awaiting her has no place in any justice system.

Arrested for their appearance

Ferdous was arrested along with 11 other young women on 25 June who were leaving a church ceremony at the Evangelical Baptist Church in Khartoum North. The women were all wearing skirts or trousers, yet were accused of violating Article 152 of Sudan's 1991 Criminal Act, which forbids 'indecent or immoral dress' and carries a punishment of up to 40 lashes and a fine.

Ferdous and nine others were charged; the youngest of the women was just 15, the eldest 23.

After they were arrested, the women were kept in the police station for over 24 hours, where they say they were subjected to degrading treatment and humiliating verbal abuse.

Sentenced to lashes – and charged again for her clothing in court

Ferdous has not only been sentenced for her appearance outside the church – she was charged again for the clothes she wore in the courtroom at her trial. The judge decided to defy all proper legal proceedings by bringing the same charges against her twice, as he believed the dress Ferdous wore to court to be 'indecent'.

She was sentenced to a large fine for her appearance in court (paid on her behalf by activists and supporters), as well as the lashes. Ferdous' lawyers are appealing both sentences.

Flogging and other forms of corporal punishment should never be used as punishment – they constitute torture, and should not be inflicted as part of a justice system. Moreover, these women have committed no crime – they have instead been subjected to random, vaguely worded, discriminatory laws.

Five women 'guilty'

After Ferdous' lawyers lodged an official complaint about the judge's behaviour at her hearing, the other young women had their cases presided over a different judge. Half of the group who faced charges have been found guilty by the courts.

Rehab Omer Kakoum was found guilty on 14 July and fined 500 Sudanese Pounds. She is appealing the sentence.

Nasra Omer Kakoum, Wigdan Abdallah Salih and Uthan Omer Eljaily were all found guilty on 12 August and fined 50 Sudanese Pounds.

You are being heard

Thankfully, five of the women have been found innocent of the charges against them - we believe partly due to activism and international pressure.

Seema Ali Osman was found innocent at her trial on 16 August and cleared of charges.

Ishraga James, Mawahib Suleiman and Inas Mohamed Elkamani and Hala Ibrahim were also found innocent on 12 August.

While they should never been put through the torment of arrest and trial for their clothing in the first place, it's a relief that these women will not be punished for the absurd crime through the courts.

Sudan's ban on women wearing trousers

Some of the young women facing trial were wearing skirts, some wearing trousers when they were arrested.

Sudan's famous intolerance of women wearing trousers made international headlines when Sudanese journalist Lubna Hussein was fined for wearing trousers in 2009.

'Indecent or immoral dress' was outlawed in Sudan in 1991 with the creation of the country's Criminal Act. Under Article 152, the Public Order Police (known as the 'morality police') can arrest a man or woman they believe to be 'causing annoyance to public feelings' through their appearance.

'Whoever commits, in a public space, an act, or conducts himself in an indecent manner, or a manner contrary to public morality, or wears an indecent or immoral dress, which causes annoyance to public feelings, shall be punished, with whipping, not exceeding 40 lashes, or with a fine, or with both.'

Although the law can be applied equally to men and women, in practice women it is disproportionately women who are discriminated against using the Act.

Article 152 of the Criminal Code is part of a broader set of laws and practices, known as the public order regime, which condone flogging for behaviour seen to be 'immoral' - primarily in public, although sometimes also in a private setting.

Discrimination against Christians in Sudan

Though they were arrested by a Baptist church in Khartoum, the women are all from the Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan state, home to one of Sudan's largest Christian communities.

Sudan is a predominantly Muslim country, ruled by Shari 'a law. Christians comprise around 3% of the country's population.

A lawyer for the women told The Guardian that the women 'have different traditions and customs from Muslims, and they are being tried because the law is [too] loose'.

Last year, another Christian woman, Meriam Ibrahim, made international headlines when she was sentenced to death for refusing to renounce her Christian faith. After a high-

profile campaign for her release, Meriam was freed just weeks after she was sentenced to hang.

South Sudanese reverends stopped at Khartoum airport

CSW (06.08.2015) - Reverends Yat Michael and Peter Reith have been prevented from leaving Sudan. They were stopped at Khartoum Airport on 6 August and informed that a travel ban issued against them on 23 March was still in force.

The South Sudanese clergymen had been [released from prison](#) following a court hearing on 5 August, during which Rev Michael was convicted of participation in a criminal organisation and Rev Reith of breaching public peace. Both were released on time served.

The legal team representing the clergymen immediately launched an appeal for the travel ban to be revoked, but was informed that the appeal would be heard on 9 August.

It is unclear whether it was the Prosecutor's Office or Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) that issued the ban. If it was issued by the Prosecutor's Office, it can be overturned by the courts. However, if it was issued by NISS, the appeal will be subject to NISS protocols and may be longer and more complex.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "Yesterday Reverends Yat Michael and Peter Reith were released by the court. Now they are being prevented from leaving Sudan after many months were unnecessarily taken from them during their incarceration. We hope that this delay is down to a bureaucratic oversight and is not an official effort to prolong their suffering. We call for urgent interventions from members of the international community who have been observing the case to ensure the travel ban is lifted and that the clergymen are allowed to resume their normal lives. We also urge Sudanese officials of good will to allow these men to leave and end the ongoing harassment of Christians."

Sudan court clears South Sudan pastors of spying charges

BBC (05.08.2015) - <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-33795358> - A court in Sudan has freed two South Sudanese Christian pastors after acquitting them of charges that include spying and crimes against the state.

Outside the court in the capital, Khartoum, the men's families rejoiced and sang, AFP news agency reports.

Yat Michael and Peter Yen Reith had faced a possible death sentence if convicted.

Sudan has a majority Muslim population governed by Islamic law, and Christians often complain of persecution.

Last year there was global condemnation when a Sudanese woman was sentenced to hang for apostasy - renouncing her religion - after marrying a Christian man.

Her sentence was overturned by an appeals court and she is now living in the US with her husband.

"I am feeling free because I was in jail for many months," [Mr Michael told the Christian Solidarity Worldwide advocacy group](#) after his release. He added that he felt as though he was "born again".

He was taken into custody last December after delivering a sermon in the capital.

His colleague, Mr Reith, was arrested the following month when he came to look for the clergyman.

The two, who belong to the South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church, were found guilty of other minor charges.

Mr Michael was convicted of disturbing the peace and Mr Reith for participating in a criminal organisation.

"The sentence they served in prison is enough, release them immediately and return the mobile phones and laptops," Judge Ahmed Ghaboush is quoted by AFP as saying.

BBC Sudan analyst Mohanad Hashim says many in Khartoum believe the spying charges were fabricated and that the real battle with the authorities is over land.

Government officials want churches in the city to give up some of the vast tracts of land they own so that it can be used for investment, he says.

Churches have been reluctant to part with the land, even though their position has been weakened since South Sudan became independent in 2011.

Sudan: Country Profile

BBC (18.06.2015) - <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14094995> - Sudan, once the largest and one of the most geographically diverse states in Africa, split into two countries in July 2011 after the people of the south voted for independence.

The government of Sudan gave its blessing for an independent South Sudan, where the mainly Christian and Animist people had for decades been struggling against rule by the Arab Muslim north.

However, various outstanding secession issues - especially the question of shared oil revenues and the exact border demarcation - have continued to create tensions between the two successor states.

Sudan has long been beset by conflict. Two rounds of north-south civil war cost the lives of 1.5 million people, and a continuing conflict in the western region of Darfur has driven two million people from their homes and killed more than 200,000.

Sudan's centuries of association with Egypt formally ended in 1956, when joint British-Egyptian rule over the country ended.

At a glance

- **Humanitarian crisis:** Civil war in Darfur region is seen as "one of the worst nightmares in recent history"
- **Politics:** South Sudan seceded in July 2011 after opting for independence in a referendum
- **International:** President Omar Bashir faces war crimes charges over Darfur
- **Economy:** Oil production and revenues have been rising

Country profiles compiled by [BBC Monitoring](#)

Independence was rapidly overshadowed by unresolved constitutional tensions with the south, which flared up into full-scale civil war that the coup-prone central government was ill-equipped to suppress.

The military-led government of President Jaafar Numeiri agreed to autonomy for the south in 1972, but fighting broke out again in 1983.

After two years of bargaining, the rebels signed a comprehensive peace deal with the government to end the civil war in January 2005.

The accord provided for a high degree of autonomy for the south, and an option for it to secede. South Sudan seceded in July 2011, following a vote.

However, the grievances of the northern states of South Kordofan and Blue Nile remain unaddressed, as provisions laid out for them in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement were never fully implemented.

In Darfur, in western Sudan, the United Nations has accused pro-government Arab militias of a campaign of ethnic cleansing against non-Arab locals.

The conflict has strained relations between Sudan and Chad, to the west. Both countries have accused each other of cross-border incursions. There have been fears that the Darfur conflict could lead to a regional war.

The economic dividends of eventual peace could be great. Sudan has large areas of cultivatable land, as well as gold and cotton. Its oil reserves are ripe for further exploitation.

Sudan Rev Yat Michael and Rev Peter Reith released

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (05.08.2015) - <http://bit.ly/1i9LiTW> - Reverends Yat Michael and Peter Reith have been released following a court hearing on 5 August.

Reverends Yat Michael and Peter Reith, the South Sudanese clergymen who were on trial in Khartoum on serious criminal charges, have been released following a court hearing on 5 August.

The clergymen faced at least six charges, including undermining the constitutional system (Article 50); espionage (Article 53); promoting hatred amongst sects (Article 64); breach of public peace (Article 69); and offences relating to insulting religious beliefs (Article 125). Of the charges, Articles 50 and 53 carry the death penalty or life imprisonment in the event of a guilty verdict.

During today's hearing Rev Reith was convicted of participation in criminal or terrorist organisations and Rev Michael of breaching public peace, but both were released on time served. In a comment to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) Rev Michael said: "I am feeling free because I was in jail for many months. I have become like I'm born again."

Rev Michael and Rev Reith were detained on 14 December 2014 and 11 January 2015 respectively. Until 1 March, they were held incommunicado by the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), after which they were transferred to the Attorney General's custody, charged with the six crimes and brought before court.

Since being moved to the maximum security Kober Prison on 6 June, the pastors had not been allowed visits from their families or legal team, despite repeated appeals, and could only consult with their lawyers briefly prior to court hearings.

However, on 3 August Rev Reith was permitted a telephone call to his lawyer and informed him that although he was suffering from malaria and a chest infection, his condition had somewhat improved.

On 4 August came reports the cases of eight Christian women accused of dressing indecently were being transferred to a different court following procedural irregularities by the trial judge.

Sudan: Christian pastors' defence team close their case

Christian Today (15.07.2015) - <http://bit.ly/1MtByxx> - The defence team of two South Sudanese pastors facing trial for espionage in Sudan have closed their case, and campaigners remain hopeful that they will be acquitted of all charges.

Rev Yat Michael and Rev David Yein Reith (also named as Peter Yein Reith in some reports) are being held on six charges including espionage, "offending Islamic beliefs", promoting hatred amongst sects and undermining the constitutional system. They could face the death penalty or life imprisonment if found guilty. They both maintain their innocence.

According to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), two witnesses were presented at yesterday's hearing in Khartoum. Ex-army general and 2010 presidential candidate, Abdul Aziz Khalid, testified that the charges of security and espionage are without basis. Evidence presented by the prosecution was available to the public, Khalid told the court.

Michael was arrested on December 14, 2014, and Reith in January of this year. They were both detained without charges, and without access to a lawyer or their families, until March 1. Ahead of yesterday's hearing, they were denied access to their legal team, despite promises that they would be allowed a 15 minute briefing with their lawyer, Mohaned Mustafa.

The pastors have also been denied regular visits from relatives, which is illegal under the Sudanese constitution. "This is meant to put more psychological pressures and warfare on the arrested pastors," a legal representative told World Watch Monitor.

Michael and Reith will return to court for another hearing on July 23, where closing statements will be given. A verdict is expected on August 5.

Mervyn Thomas, chief executive of CSW, said of yesterday's hearing: "The court heard from a prominent expert witness that there is no basis for the charges against the pastors. We therefore renew our call for these unwarranted and extreme charges to be dropped and for Rev Yat Michael and Rev Peter Reith to be released unconditionally and without further delay.

"The ongoing denial of access to the pastors' legal team is unacceptable and in violation of fair trial principles, as articulated in Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Sudan is a party. The denial of family visits is a further measure to increase their mental and emotional distress; a cruel and unjust action on the part of the State.

"We urge the African Union in particular, and the wider international community, to challenge Sudan on its treatment of the pastors and its failure to protect and promote freedom of religion or belief and the right to a fair trial."

Women risk flogging for 'indecent' clothing

Amnesty Int'l (09.07.2015) - The Public Order Police have charged 10 female Christian students with "indecent dress" and subjected them to verbal abuse during their detention. The charge carries the punishment of flogging.

The Public Order Police (POP) arrested 12 female Christian students on 25 June. Ten of them were charged with "indecent dress", under Article 152 of Sudan's 1991 Criminal Act, while the other two were released. The POP subjected the students to degrading treatment and humiliating verbal abuse during their detention. Article 152 of the 1991 Criminal Act gives POP extensive powers to arrest any person for "indecent dress" and the punishment if found guilty is 40 lashes, or a fine, or with both. In practice the law is used exclusively against women.

The POP stopped the 12 students at 10 pm in front of the Evangelical Baptist Church in Khartoum North, where they had attended a ceremony, and took them to a local police station in Khartoum North.

According to information obtained by Amnesty International, the students are between 17 and 23 years old, and all are Christians, originally from the war-torn Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan state. At the time of their arrest, some were wearing trousers and others skirts. Two of the students were released about four hours after their arrest and the remaining 10 were released on bail at around 10 am on 27 June. The 10 were taken to court on 28 June where the charges against them were confirmed and court dates set. One student, Fardos Al Toum, 19, appeared in court on 6 July, wearing another dress deemed indecent by the judge who, disregarding any due process, immediately sentenced her to a fine of 500 Sudanese pounds (\$83) or a month in prison. Her fine was paid by activists and her supporters and she will appear in court again in relation to the original charge. Another student, aged 17, appeared in court on 7 July and, because of her age, was transferred to a Juvenile Court.

The other nine students: Fardos Al Toum, 19; Ishraga James, 20; Uthan Omer Eljaily, 22; Diana Yagoub Abd Alrahman, 19; Seema Ali Osman, 20; Inas Mohamed Elkomani, 23; Rehab Omer Kakoum, 18; Nasra Omer Kakoum, 20; and Wigdan Abdallah Salih – will appear in court on 9, 13, 16 and 17 July according to their lawyer.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Urging the Sudanese authorities to drop the charges against the 10 female Christian students immediately and unconditionally;
- Calling on them to abolish the penalty of flogging, which violates the absolute prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- Urging them to repeal Article 152 of the 1991 Criminal Act, which is vague and discriminatory and fails to adhere to Sudan's international human rights obligations.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 AUGUST 2015 TO:

President
HE Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir
Office of the President
People's Palace

PO Box 281
Khartoum, Sudan
Email: info@presidency.gov.sd
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice
Awad Al Hassan Alnour
Ministry of Justice
PO Box 302
Al Nil Avenue
Khartoum, Sudan
Email: moj@moj.gov.sd
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of Interior
Ismat Abdul-Rahman Zain Al-Abdin Ministry of Interior
PO Box 873
Khartoum, Sudan

The flogging of women in Sudan for “indecent or immoral dress” under Article 152 of the 1991 Criminal Act came into the international spotlight in 2009 through the case of journalist Lubna Hussein, who was prosecuted for wearing trousers in 2009. Amnesty International has documented several cases of other women and girls convicted for “indecent or immoral dress” as the provision is applied in a discriminatory and disproportionate manner against women.

Article 152 states: “Whoever commits, in a public space, an act, or conducts himself in an indecent manner, or a manner contrary to public morality, or wears an indecent or immoral dress, which causes annoyance to public feelings, shall be punished, with whipping, not exceeding 40 lashes, or with a fine, or with both. The act shall be contrary to public morals if it is regarded as such according to the standard of the person’s religion or the custom of the country where the act takes place.” Article 152 is part of a broader set of laws and practices, known as the public order regime, which allow corporal punishment for what is seen as immoral behaviour in public, or sometimes in private, affecting a wide range of people, particularly women, throughout Sudan.

The public order laws do not specify what is meant by “immoral” or “indecent” dress, so the POP have broad discretion to judge whether a person has acted in “an indecent manner, or a manner contrary to public morality” or “wears an indecent, or immoral dress, which causes annoyance to public feelings.” The public order regime includes the POP and public order courts which can impose flogging of up to 40 lashes. Amnesty International opposes judicial corporal punishment such as flogging, which violates the absolute prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

In an unrelated incident, but highlighting the extensive use of judicial corporal punishment in Sudan’s legal system, on 6 July, a court in Khartoum tried and convicted three members of the opposition Sudanese Congress Party (SCP) including the Political Secretary of the SCP Mastour Ahmed Mohamed, under Article 69 of Sudan’s 1991 Criminal Act article “the Disturbance of Public Peace”, and they received 20 lashes. The three SCP members were arrested on 28 April following their speech in a public event in Omdurman criticising the outcome of Sudan’s April 2015 elections.

The punishment of up to 40 lashes imposed under the 1991 Criminal Act is a clear violation of Article 33 of Sudan’s 2005 Interim Constitution, Article 5 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and Article 7 of the International Covenant on

Civil and Political (ICCPR), to which the Republic of Sudan is a state party. In response to a complaint that was lodged in 2000, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in May 2003 found that the Republic of Sudan was in violation of Article 5 of the African Charter. It requested the Government of Sudan to immediately amend the Criminal Law of 1991, in conformity with its obligations under the African Charter and other relevant international human rights instruments; abolish the penalty of lashes; and to take appropriate measures to ensure compensation of the victims. The prohibition is also contained in the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. As a signatory to the convention, Sudan must not act in a manner inconsistent with the object and purpose of the Convention.

South Sudan pastors' lawyer arrested day before they were due in court

World Watch Monitor (02.07.2015) - There is still no announcement from the Khartoum trial about the outcome for the two South Sudanese Presbyterian pastors, Yat Michael and Peter Yen, which is scheduled to end today after the judge has finished questioning the two men.

The judge indicated in the last hearing on 25 June that he will decide on 2 July whether to drop the case against them or allow it to continue, [in which case the two men will face the possibility of the death penalty](#) or life imprisonment in the event of a guilty verdict.

Michael and Yen were charged jointly with acts of criminal conspiracy (Article 21 of the Sudanese Penal Code); undermining the constitutional system (Article 50); espionage (Article 53); disclosure and receipt of official information or documents (Article 55); promoting hatred amongst sects (Article 64); breach of public peace (Article 69); and offences relating to insulting religious beliefs (Article 125). Of the six charges, Articles 50 and 53 carry the death penalty or life imprisonment in the event of a guilty verdict.

Espionage

WWM has recently learned that they have been charged with espionage (Article 53 of the Sudan Penal Code) and promoting hatred amongst sects (Article 64), instead of waging war against the state (Article 51) and arousing feelings of discontent among regular forces (Article 62), as previously reported. The espionage charge (Article 53) carries the death penalty or life imprisonment in the event of a conviction.

Both men have been detained at the high security Kober Prison in Khartoum North since 1 March, before which they were being held incommunicado. The two are no longer in solitary confinement, but are reported to have been chained up. Michael was taken into custody on 21 December 2014 after preaching that morning at a church in Khartoum. Peter Yen was arrested on 11 January 2015 after he delivered a letter to the Religious Affairs Office in Khartoum asking about his colleague Michael's arrest in December.

Their wives have managed to see them, a source has told [Radio Tamazuj](#). Their visit last Thursday came after the judge allowed the two men to speak with their families for just 10 minutes. Prison authorities continue to ban regular visits despite it being unconstitutional to deny prisoners a visit from family members and friends.

A lawyer speaking on behalf of the detained pastors said: "This is meant to put more psychological pressures and warfare on the arrested pastors."

Pastors' lawyer arrested

In a new development, Mohamed Mustafa, the lawyer representing the two men, was arrested yesterday along with Pastor Hafez of the Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church, the church where Yat Michael preached and spoke out against the persecution of Christians in Sudan, and an ongoing land dispute between the church and the government.

According to the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), local sources (unnamed for security) understood that the church asked the men's lawyer to come to the church because the police had showed up with engineers to demolish it under a government order. At the scene, lawyer Mustafa asked to review the order. It clearly authorised the government to destroy section 5D of the church compound, but the police were instructing them to destroy section 5H. The engineer took the matter up with the police present. Angered by the situation the police then arrested Pastor Hafez, put him in handcuffs and walked him to the police station through the public market. Mustafa stayed on the church compound and overheard the engineer continue to press the police officer on the matter. At that time, the police told Mustafa he had no right to stay on the property; he responded calmly that he was the legal representative, had done nothing wrong, and was there to observe that the court order was followed properly.

He was then arrested and taken to the police station and held for five hours before being released on bail. Both Hafez and Mustafa are now out on bail, but will have to defend their actions before a criminal court. They have been charged with violating article 99 of the Sudanese Penal Code of 1991 which criminalizes obstructing a public servant during the course of his duty. If convicted they could receive up to six months imprisonment, a fine or both.

"This arrest of [the pastors'] attorney is of great concern. While we are pleased that he was promptly released on bail, the arrest shows a potential that high-level individuals are attempting to interfere in the judicial cases involving both the church land dispute and Pastors Michael and Yen," said Tiffany Barrans, International Legal Director at the American Centre for Law and Justice (ACLJ).

Meanwhile in another part of Khartoum, 12 Christian women were arrested on 25 June on public indecency charges by Sudan's Public Order Police after leaving a celebration service at the city's El Izba Baptist Church. They were charged with indecent or immoral dress under Article 152 of the Sudanese Criminal Code. The women, who were wearing skirts and trousers, were taken to a police station and forced to remove their clothes, which were submitted as evidence to the prosecutor.

"The penal Code of Sudan was introduced in 1991 and is based upon a narrow interpretation of Shari'a (Islamic law)," according to research by Amnesty International (AI). "It contains," it says, "legal provisions that amount to a denial of fundamental human rights including limitations on the rights and freedoms of non-Muslims. Sudan's legal system allows and promotes the conversion of the Sudanese people from Christianity and other religions to Islam, but makes proselytizing of Sudanese Muslims a crime punishable by flogging, and conversion from Islam is considered apostasy, and is punishable by death.

"Suppression of non-Muslim and Muslim minority groups and violations of freedom of religion is wide spread in Sudan, reports AI. Since 1989 a specific interpretation of Islam was allowed to dominate the country's laws, institutions and policies. As a result thousands of non-Muslims have been forced to convert to Islam, priests and church leaders persecuted and thousands of Christians punished according to Shari'a law," the report adds.

'Prisoners of conscience'

AI considers Michael and Yen to be "prisoners of conscience who were arrested, detained and charged solely because of the peaceful expression of their religious convictions".

The case of the two pastors has drawn worldwide attention as an abuse of human rights. One online campaign by [CitizenGo](#) has so far collected more than 100,000 signatures that will be sent to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Sudanese president. The campaign was motivated by the success of people power in helping free Meriam Ibrahim when she was detained by the Sudan government.

Michael and his wife arrived in Sudan on 13 December with their child whom they had brought to Khartoum for medical attention. During his visit he was asked to preach at the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church, in the Khartoum suburb of Bahri, on Sunday 21 December 2014. During Michael's sermon he had apparently condemned the controversial sale of the church land and property and the treatment of Christians in Sudan.

The African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies ([ACJPS](#)) reported at the time that "the sale was made by the Community Council of the Church, a body appointed by the Government of Sudan's Ministry of Endowments and Guidance - which reportedly does not have a mandate to sell church land. Sudanese police forces violently raided the church on 2 December 2014 to break up a sit-in demonstration organized by members of the congregation protesting the sale. Thirty eight people were arrested and 20 convicted of disturbing the public peace and membership of criminal or terrorist organisations [following the protest]".

Peter Yen arrived in Sudan in September 2014 and was arrested on 11 January 2015 from his home attached to Al Gereif Church in Khartoum, after he delivered a letter to the Religious Affairs Office in Khartoum asking about his colleague Michael's arrest in December. Yen had apparently also been vocal about his opposition to the sale of land by the Community Council and voiced concern on the situation facing Christians in Sudan.

ACJPS has stated "the serious criminal charges against Michael and Yen have been levied solely on the basis of their religious convictions and outspoken criticism of the ruling party, and as such, that their continued detention and criminal proceedings are discriminatory and in violation of constitutional and international legal guarantees of equality. There is also speculation that the trial of the two men is intended to send a message to other Christian leaders in Sudan to refrain from criticizing the treatment of Christian minorities in Sudan and the policies of the ruling party".

S Sudan pastors will face trial, judge rules

World Watch Monitor (02.07.2015) - A Sudanese judge has decided enough evidence exists to require two South Sudanese Presbyterian pastors to face trial on espionage and other charges that could carry the death penalty, according to a US-based religious-freedom group.

The American Center for Law & Justice [reported late Thursday](#) that the judge made the ruling on 2 July after a day-long hearing concerning the pastors, Yat Michael and Peter Yen.

The judge had indicated at a June 25 hearing that he would decide July 2 whether to drop the case against them or allow it to continue, in which case the two men [will face the possibility of the death penalty](#) or life imprisonment in the event of a guilty verdict.

The Washington, DC-based American Center for Law & Justice, which provides legal assistance to international religious-freedom cases, said the judge's ruling is not a conviction but means the pastors now must counter the charges by presenting evidence to demonstrate their innocence. Their lawyer, Muhaned Mustafa, has less than two weeks to prepare their case for the next hearing on 14 July. Mustafa will have only about 15 minutes with his clients, prior to the hearing, to prepare them.

At the end of those proceedings, the court will have the final opportunity to review all the evidence presented and drop the charges or convict the pastors.

During Wednesday's hearing the judge questioned both men about documents found on their computer after their arrests, which included internal church reports, maps that show the population and topography of Khartoum, Christian literature, and a study guide on the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS).

"All of these materials, with the exception of the internal church report and the study guide on NISS are publicly accessible materials," explains the ACLJ.

The pastors acknowledged having the internal church report, though both said they had never seen the study guide on NISS until it was presented in court. They had no knowledge of how it got on the computer.

Evidence brought by prosecution

Besides these documents, the only evidence brought by the prosecution against the Christian pastors was a sermon Michael gave on the Christian doctrines of their denomination.

At the conclusion of today's court hearing, their lawyer, Mustafa, requested better access to his clients, but the judge only had authority to grant him visitation at the court.

"Sudanese law grants sole discretion for visitation rights at the prison to the prison directorate, who in this case has previously denied requests for access," explained the ACLJ.

Denying the pastors access to their lawyer to prepare their case is a violation of rights guaranteed both under Sudanese law and international law. The attorney will appeal the matter to the prison authorities on 5 July.

Meanwhile the judge offered the attorney upto 15 minutes at the court to prepare his defense. The attorney protested that such time is not adequate to prepare a defense, let alone a defense for charge that carry the death penalty, but to no avail.

Both men will continue to be detained at the high security Kober Prison in Khartoum North, where they've been since 1 March. They are no longer in solitary confinement.

Michael and Yen were charged jointly with acts of criminal conspiracy (Article 21 of the Sudanese Penal Code); undermining the constitutional system (Article 50); espionage (Article 53); disclosure and receipt of official information or documents (Article 55); promoting hatred amongst sects (Article 64); breach of public peace (Article 69); and

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Michael was taken into custody on 21 December 2014 after preaching that morning at a church in Khartoum. Peter Yen was arrested on 11 January 2015 after he delivered a letter to the Religious Affairs Office in Khartoum asking about his colleague Michael's arrest in December.

Their wives have managed to see them, a source has told [Radio Tamazuji](#). Their visit last Thursday came after the judge allowed the two men to speak with their families for just 10 minutes. Prison authorities continue to ban regular visits despite it being unconstitutional to deny prisoners a visit from family members and friends.

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Peter Yen arrived in Sudan in September 2014 and was arrested on 11 January 2015 from his home attached to Al Gereif Church in Khartoum, after he delivered a letter to the Religious Affairs Office in Khartoum asking about his colleague Michael's arrest in December. Yen had apparently also been vocal about his opposition to the sale of land by the Community Council and voiced concern on the situation facing Christians in Sudan.

ACJPS has stated "the serious criminal charges against Michael and Yen have been levied solely on the basis of their religious convictions and outspoken criticism of the ruling party, and as such, that their continued detention and criminal proceedings are discriminatory and in violation of constitutional and international legal guarantees of equality. There is also speculation that the trial of the two men is intended to send a message to other Christian leaders in Sudan to refrain from criticizing the treatment of Christian minorities in Sudan and the policies of the ruling party".

Christian pastors on trial in Sudan moved to high security prison

Christian Today (09.06.2015) - <http://bit.ly/1QkTqka> - Two South Sudanese pastors facing criminal charges in Sudan have been moved to a high security prison and have not been allowed any visitors, their lawyers have confirmed.

Rev Yat Michael and Rev Peter Reith were previously detained at the low security Omdurman Men's Prison, and were last seen by their relatives and pastors from their church on June 3. When their families returned on June 4, they were refused access, and authorities confirmed two days later that the men were now at Kober Prison in North Khartoum.

According to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), no one has been allowed to visit either Michael or Reith and there is speculation that the lockdown is on the orders of the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS).

Michael was arrested on 14 December 2014, and Reith in January of this year. They were both detained without charges, and without access to a lawyer or their families, until March 1. They are now being held on six charges including espionage, "offending Islamic beliefs" and undermining the constitutional system. Two of the charges carry the death penalty or life imprisonment.

The men maintain they have not committed any crime. Michael recently told CBN news from his prison cell that he didn't know why he had been arrested: "We just go to to out ministry training in our church".

Pastor Reith (who has been named as David Yein in some reports) said that despite his treatment, "I am not afraid of anything".

"I am never afraid of anything because it is my love... because I believe. God chose me to suffer," he said.

The men's next hearing is due to take place on June 15.

Chief executive of CSW, Mervyn Thomas, said he is concerned by the latest development in the clergymen's case.

"They already endured extended detention without access to their families at the beginning of this year and they and their families should be spared further emotional distress," he said in a statement.

"Moreover, the refusal of access to their legal representatives is in violation of article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Sudan is

party, and which guarantees the right of those charged with a crime to communicate with counsel of their own choosing.

"We urge the Sudanese authorities to ensure that the clergymen's detention is regularised, and they are permitted regular family visits and unhindered access to their lawyers. The decision to detain them at a higher security prison should be reconsidered, given that they have not been found guilty of any crime."

Freedom of religion or belief is guaranteed in Sudan's constitution, but it is ranked sixth on Open Doors' World Watch List of countries where Christians face the most persecution. It has been designated a 'country of particular concern' by the US State Department since 1999.

South Sudanese church leaders jailed in Sudan could face death penalty

Pastor says he is trusting God will intervene on their behalf

Morning Star News (08.06.2015) - <http://morningstarnews.org/2015/05/south-sudanese-church-leaders-jailed-in-sudan-charged-could-face-death-penalty/> - Sudanese authorities have charged two South Sudanese pastors under laws that call for the death penalty, their attorney said.

National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) officials have charged the Rev. Yat Michael and the Rev. Peter Yein Reith (also transliterated as Peter Yen Reith) with undermining the constitutional system (Article 50 of the Sudan Penal Code) and spying (Article 53) - offenses punishable by death or life imprisonment - and waging war against the state (Article 51), which calls for the death sentence, said the pastors' attorney.

They are also charged with inciting organized forces to complain and assaulting religious beliefs, which call for prison sentences, the attorney said.

"The charges are serious," the attorney, a Muslim, told Morning Star News. "However, we are doing everything possible to ensure their release. We hope to hear good news about their release in coming days."

NISS is manned by hard-line Islamists who are given broad powers to arrest Christians, black Africans, South Sudanese and other people lowly regarded in the country that President Omar al-Bashir has pledged will be fully Arabic and Islamic. The charges appear to be based solely on the two pastors' nationality, race and faith, sources said.

Sudan fought a civil war with south Sudanese from 1983 to 2005, and since June 2011 has been fighting a rebel group in the Nuba Mountains that has its roots in South Sudan, which became a separate country in 2011.

Michael was arrested on Dec. 21, 2014 after visiting a church service in Khartoum, and Reith was arrested on Jan. 11 after submitting a letter from leaders of their denomination, the South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SSPEC), inquiring about the whereabouts of Michael.

Their location was unknown for months, violating international human rights agreements, but on April 30 they were transferred from Khartoum's downtown police station to a NISS detention center on Street 51 in Khartoum, Michael's wife told Morning Star News. On Monday (May 4) they were transferred to Omdurman Prison, she said.

Morning Star News managed to speak with Michael on Thursday (May 7).

"God will intervene and protect us even in prison despite the serious charges brought against us," the pastor said. "Thank you all for your prayers and concerns for us over this long period of imprisonment."

NISS officials have demanded \$12,000 from the SSPEC secretary general, the Rev. Philip Akway Obang, for the release of the pastors, sources said. Local church leaders expressed their outrage at the attempt to buy the pastors' freedom, saying they fear NISS would arrest other Christians and make the same demand in exchange for dropping charges.

A NISS officer who identified himself only as Jamal confirmed that the agency had demanded that the pastors pay \$6,000 each for the charges to be dropped.

The church that Michael had visited and encouraged in December, [Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church](#), was the subject of government harassment, arrests and demolition of part of its worship center as Muslim investors took it over. NISS officials appear to be determined to punish the pastors for their support of the embattled congregation, sources said.

The two pastors began a hunger strike on April 28 to protest their incarceration. The attorney said the charges against them were quietly filed in March, and that they are awaiting a hearing on Thursday (May 14) in Khartoum North.

The pastors' families have waited in agony, not knowing how they have been treated.

"We are still worried about their detention," Michael's wife said. "Let us continue to pray for them so that God can help them to be released."

Amnesty International has said holding the pastors incommunicado violates the Interim Constitution of Sudan, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, all of which legally bind the Sudanese Government and all its agents.

"Holding the detainees incommunicado increases their risk of being subjected to torture or ill treatment and/or enforced disappearance," Amnesty reported in February.

Other Christians in the Bahri congregation have also been arrested. Police in North Khartoum on Dec. 2 beat and arrested 38 Christians from the church that Michael encouraged and fined most of them. They were released later that night.

On Oct. 5, 2013, Sudan's police and security forces broke through the church fence, beat and arrested Christians in the compound and asserted parts of the property belonged to a Muslim investor accompanying them. As Muslims nearby shouted, "*Allahu Akbar* [God is greater]," plainclothes police and personnel from NISS broke onto the property aboard a truck and two Land Cruisers. After beating several Christians who were in the compound, they arrested some of them; they were all released later that day.

Harassment, arrests and persecution of Christians have intensified since the secession of South Sudan in July 2011, when Bashir vowed to adopt a stricter version of *sharia* (Islamic law) and recognize only Islamic culture and the Arabic language. The Sudanese Minister of Guidance and Endowments announced in April 2013 that no new licenses would be granted for building new churches in Sudan, citing a decrease in the South Sudanese population.

Sudan since 2012 has expelled foreign Christians and bulldozed church buildings on the pretext that they belonged to South Sudanese. Besides raiding Christian bookstores and arresting Christians, authorities threatened to kill South Sudanese Christians who do not leave or cooperate with them in their effort to find other Christians.

Trial of S. Sudan pastors begins, then is delayed

WWM (19.05.2015) - After the May 19 start of the trial of Yat Michael and Peter Yein, the judge ordered a 12-day recess.

Nahmia Shaloka, a Sudanese lawyer who left the country because of his human rights activity and now lives in the United States, said a judge of Khartoum North (Bahri) Criminal Court set a May 31 date to resume the trial.

According to Shaloka, on May 19 a lawyer for the defence, Osman Almoubarak, told the Sudanese news website al-Taghyeer that the prosecutor showed to the court a CD, claiming that it contained an illegal speech given by Michael at the Presbyterian Evangelical Church of Khartoum North (Bahri). Almoubarak also produced a computer memory disk that he claimed belonged to Michael and contains evidence against him, according to Shaloka.

Original story

Two South Sudanese pastors being held in Omdurman prison in Khartoum could face the death sentence when their trial continues on 19 May.

World Watch Monitor reported in February that Yat Michael and Peter Yen (*also named as David Yein Reith in some reports*) were held in unknown locations after being arrested during a visit to Khartoum, Sudan's capital, from their homes in South Sudan, which gained independence in 2011. On 4 May they were charged with a series of offences, two of which - undermining the constitutional system and waging war against the state - carry the possibility of the death penalty or life imprisonment.

Michael was taken into custody on 21 December after preaching that morning at the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC) Khartoum Bahri congregation. After the service several men who identified themselves as officers from the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) demanded that Michael go with them, and took him away without further explanation. The next day the security forces went to Michael's temporary home and took some of his clothes and personal belongings. They informed his wife that he was being held in relation to an ongoing investigation but did not reveal any further details, whether he was under arrest or what the charges were.

Michael and his wife had taken their child to Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, for medical attention but had been asked to preach at a church during their visit, sources told World Watch Monitor.

Arrested

Yen was arrested on 11 January after he delivered a letter to the Religious Affairs Office in Khartoum asking about his colleague Michael's arrest in December. Both men belong to the South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church.

Their case was postponed until this week due to the availability of a representative of the NISS. The lawyer representing the two men believes the charges against them will be dropped, but the involvement of the NISS may lead to a different outcome.

Shaloka, the former Sudanese lawyer, said the NISS legal advisor will try to connect Michael's speech at the church to the charges filed against them.

"For me there is no evidence," Shaloka said. "So far the whole thing is to give their [the NISS] action legal justification. The NISS claim to have evidence and this will be clear at the hearing on May 19."

According to Amnesty International, the NISS is an agency that is above the law. Priscilla Nyagoah, a campaigner for Sudan and South Sudan at Amnesty International's regional office in east Africa, [said in a recent blog](#) that the Sudanese parliament amended its constitution in January to extend NISS' mandate to perform duties currently carried out by the armed forces and law enforcement agencies, adding that the amendment doesn't require the agency to abide by relevant international, regional and domestic law. "Conferring an intelligence agency such as the NISS with such a mandate, in addition to its already extensive powers of arrest, detention, search and seizure under the National Security Service Act, is particularly alarming," Nyagoah wrote.

Rights violations

Nyagoah is calling for a human rights-compliant legal framework for the NISS, which would subject its arrest and detention practices to judicial oversight, and ensures that NISS agents perpetrating human-rights violations are held to account. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights recently sent out a message against the impunity of the NISS, by declaring the Republic of Sudan guilty of violating the rights of three human-rights defenders while in NISS detention in November 2008. The decision, published in February this year, requests Sudan to pay adequate compensation to Monim Elgak, Amir Suleiman and Osman Hummeida and to prosecute all those responsible for the illegal incarceration and torture of the three.

At the continuation of their trial May 19, Michael and Yen will stand charged with disclosure and receipt of official information or documents, arousing feelings of discontent among regular forces, breach of public peace, and offences relating to insulting religious beliefs. They also will face charges of undermining the constitutional system, and waging war against the state, which carry the possibility of harsher penalties.

The church in Khartoum that Michael had been preaching at has suffered pressure from government authorities over land rights, resulting in [most of the church being destroyed](#) in December last year.

This is not the first time this year that a church building has been demolished by Sudanese authorities. In February and June 2014, churches were destroyed in Omdurman and Khartoum.

While South Sudan has a largely Christian population, Sudan is predominantly Muslim. However, many thousands of Southern Sudanese who fled the long civil war to live in the north are now so rooted there, they choose to remain. There are still churches in the north to meet their needs, although some have come under pressure in recent months.

Sudan's minister of religion, Shalil Abdullah, has said that the authorities would not issue permits for the construction of new churches.

Lawyers appeal court order to close Khartoum Bahri evangelical church

CSW (19.02.2015) - Lawyers representing the Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church in North Khartoum are due to lodge an appeal today against a court decision to confiscate the remaining property at the site and permanently close the church.

On 18 February, police arrived at the church with an order from the Khartoum Civil Court to lock and seize the outer gates of the property. Lawyers representing the church have issued a technical challenge on the wording of the order as it does not identify the specific area of the church's property affected by the order.

The Bahri Evangelical Church is part of the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church (SEPC) denomination and has been in an ongoing legal battle with the Sudanese authorities, who have attempted to sell church land to a Muslim businessman. In November 2014, congregants held a protest vigil in order to prevent NISS agents from gaining access to the land and illegally destroying and confiscating the property. In December 2014 the church was partially destroyed and 37 congregants arrested (See <http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=press&id=1811>).

The government maintains that the land was legally sold to the Muslim Businessman by a church committee. Church leaders later discovered that a secondary committee, backed by the government and formed in contravention of the SEPC's administrative processes, had entered into a contract with the Muslim Businessman. On 6 January 2015, a court ruled in favour of the legitimate church committee, but this ruling was later overturned by the Supreme Court on appeal.

The Sudanese authorities have also attempted to illegally sell other properties belonging to the SEPC. In December 2014, lawyers lodged a constitutional appeal (<http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=press&id=1815>) after the Ministry of Justice issued a one week eviction notice to the church's tenants. The chairman of the SEPC council responsible for church buildings and land, Rafat Obid, has faced a campaign of harassment by the NISS as a result of his work on the committee.

On 21 December 2014, Rev Yat Michael, a South Sudanese pastor from the South Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church (SSEPC) who preached at the Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church, was arrested by NISS agents. A second minister, Rev Peter Lein Reith, was arrested on 11 January 2015. Both men are still detained incommunicado in Khartoum.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, "CSW is deeply concerned by these developments. The questionable legal avenues utilised by the Sudanese authorities to confiscate property belonging to the Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church and other properties belonging to the SEPC are a clear attempt to financially weaken the Church and precipitate its permanent closure. These actions are in clear violation of Article 6 of Sudan's constitution, Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and Article 8 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR), which guarantee the right to freedom of religion or belief, and to which Sudan is a signatory. The court order will effectively facilitate the illegal closure of yet another church at a time when the government has stated that the construction of new churches will no longer be permitted. We call upon the international community, and in particular the African Union, to hold Sudan to its obligations to protect the right to

freedom of religion or belief and to guarantee the profession and free practice of religion as outlined in international statutes to which the nation is party.”

Sudan arrests another South Sudanese pastor

Second church leader in less than three weeks held without charges.

Morning Star News (20.01.2015) – The second pastor of South Sudanese descent in less than three weeks has been arrested without charges in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, sources said.

Sudan’s National Security and Intelligence Services (NISS) arrested the Rev. David Yein Reith of the South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church on Jan. 9 as he returned to his home at the Gerif West Bible School in Khartoum from a prayer meeting, said a source who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Reith received a phone call earlier that day from someone threatening to “arrest” his wife and 1-year-old son if he failed to go to his home immediately.

“We will arrest your entire family should you fail to come home as soon as possible,” the caller told the pastor, according to the source.

The pastor’s wife has repeatedly asked NISS officials under what charge he is being held without an answer, she said.

“We are still interrogating him; he is in custody,” one NISS official told her.

Though of South Sudanese descent, Reith has always lived in Khartoum. On Dec. 28 NISS officials arrested a visiting South Sudanese pastor from Juba, the [Rev. Yat Michael](#), after Sunday worship at Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church on Dec. 21. He is still in custody.

Authorities have repeatedly refused to allow Pastor Michael’s family to visit him since his arrest, sources said.

“Each time they said they were going to arrange a visit for me, they continued to refuse my requests to visit my husband,” said his wife, whose name is withheld for security reasons.

The Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church that Pastor Michael was visiting is a Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC)-congregation that has been the subject of harassment, arrests and demolition of part of its worship center as Muslim investors seek to take it over. Police in North Khartoum on Dec. 2 [beat, arrested](#) and fined 38 Christians from the church after nearly two weeks of raiding and demolishing church property. They were released later that night.

Article 77 of the notorious Public Order Law of 1991 gives police broad powers to arrest Christians and other lowly regarded people without cause for “creating a public disturbance.”

Pastor Michael had been invited to encourage the congregation to stand firm amid persecution.

[Five church leaders](#) arrested on Nov. 25 were released that same night.

Harassment, arrests and persecution of Christians have intensified since the secession of South Sudan in July 2011, when President Omar al-Bashir vowed to adopt a stricter version of *sharia* (Islamic law) and recognize only Islamic culture and the Arabic language.

The Sudanese Minister of Guidance and Endowments announced in April 2013 that no new licenses would be granted for building new churches in Sudan, citing a decrease in the South Sudanese population.

On Oct. 5, 2013, Sudan's police and security forces [broke through](#) the Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church fence, beat and arrested Christians in the compound and asserted parts of the property belonged to a Muslim investor accompanying them. As Muslims nearby shouted, "*Allahu Akbar* [God is greater]," plainclothes police and personnel from NISS broke onto the property aboard a truck and two Land Cruisers. After beating several Christians who were in the compound, they arrested some of them; they were all released later that day.

Following the secession of South Sudan, Sudan since 2012 has expelled foreign Christians and bulldozed church buildings on the pretext that they belonged to South Sudanese. Besides raiding Christian bookstores and arresting Christians, authorities threatened to kill South Sudanese Christians who do not leave or cooperate with them in their effort to find other Christians (see [Morning Star News](#)).

Due to its treatment of Christians and other human rights violations, Sudan has been designated a Country of Particular Concern by the U.S. State Department since 1999, and in April 2013, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom recommended the country remain on the list.
